

SECA PRESENTS

# FIRING me



HOST: WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY JR.  
GUEST: MALCOLM MUGGERIDGE  
SUBJECT: "HOW DOES ONE FIND FAITH?"

The FIRING LINE television series is a production of the Southern Educational Communications Association, PO Box 5966, Columbia, SC 29250 and is transmitted through the facilities of the Public Broadcasting Service. FIRING LINE can be seen and heard each week through public television and radio stations throughout the country. Check your local newspapers for channel and time in your area.

*FIRING LINE is produced and directed by WARREN STEIBEL*

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**SOUTHERN EDUCATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS ASSOCIATION**

MR. BUCKLEY: In December of 1980 we did a program with Malcolm Muggeridge, one of several that we have done over the years. That hour, shown during the holidays, captured the special attention of our listeners--so much so that the practice evolved of repeating it every year. Malcolm Muggeridge became famous as a journalist and author. He was, over a period of 50 years, everywhere, including fighting for his country during the world war and serving as editor of Punch magazine. When he turned to his new pursuit, quickly he became the most eloquent spokesman for the Christian religion in the English-speaking world. I remarked at the time that when he turned against the devil, the devil was outnumbered. The hour dealt with Mr. Muggeridge's feeling in his later years that something was missing in his life. He turned to the search for God and in his own wry, inquisitive, distinctive way, he found Him. I say he found Him only because he once reminded me that Blaise Pascal said that anyone who searches for God has found Him.

It isn't possible to run the entire hour under the new Firing Line schedule that limits us to a half hour, but the program has been discerningly trimmed by the producer, Mr. Steibel, and I think you will take satisfaction from it. It is perhaps appropriate at this juncture to wish you all happy holidays and a productive new year.

The first question I asked Mr. Muggeridge had to do with what it was that actually happened to him to cause him to turn to God to find his faith. What actually happened, and is it possible to describe what happened?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: You know, this sounds a very simple question, but actually it's a very difficult question to answer. Of course my evangelical friends are always rather disappointed that I can't produce a sort of a Damascus Road experience--you know, that I was such a person and then suddenly this happened and I was such another person. But I can't. That isn't something that's happened to me. This has been for me the unfolding of an enlightenment which is full of doubt as well as certainty. I rather believe in doubting. It's sometimes thought that it's the antithesis of faith, but I think it's connected with faith--something that actually Saint Augustine said--like, you know, reinforced concrete and you have those strips of metal in the concrete which make it stronger.

MR. BUCKLEY: Well, is doubt the dialectical partner of faith?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I would say so.

MR. BUCKLEY: That it forces continuous reexamination, which is why it is assumed that all the saints--or is it?--doubted.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: If it's not assumed, it's certainly true that they did; and I would agree absolutely with that. The only people I've met in this world who never doubt are materialists and atheists.

MR. BUCKLEY: But the doubts that they express are hardly theological.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I think that they have a sort of ludicrous certainty that there is nothing transcendental to know, you see. But for me, at any rate, doubt has been an integral part of coming to have faith, nor has there been, as I've said, any dramatic moment, any time when there it was, like has happened, for instance, to Pascal--people like that--or to Augustine. It's a process. And it's a process which I am quite sure will certainly continue until I depart from this life, which I shall fairly soon, and which maybe goes on into the next life, for all I know. But an integral part of belief is to doubt. Now, why did this longing for faith assail me? Insofar as I can point to anything, it is to do with this profession which both you and I followed of observing what's going on in the world and attempting to report and comment thereon, because that particular occupation gives one a very heightened sense of the sheer fantasy of human affairs--the sheer fantasy of power and of the structures that men construct out of power--and therefore gives one an intense, overwhelming longing to be in contact with reality. And so you look for reality and you try this and try that, and ultimately you arrive at the conclusion--great oversimplification--that reality is a mystery. The heart of reality is a mystery.

MR. BUCKLEY: Even if that were so, why should that mystery lead you to Christian belief?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Because it leads you to God. The mystery--and I think the best expression for it I've ever read is in a book I'm very fond of and I'm sure you know, called The Cloud of Unknowing, and it's when you are aware of the cloud of unknowing that you begin to know, and what you know--to simplify and put it very simply, is God. That's the beginning of faith for me.

MR. BUCKLEY: But that informal Christian teaching requires grace, but you seem to have described a purely deductive process.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: No, because without-- The deductive process is the means, but faith is the motive force that takes you there.

MR. BUCKLEY: In other words, if as an observer you cease to observe, then you don't have that motive force that grace contributes.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Absolutely right. That is the grace. It's exactly like-- Bill, it's exactly like falling in love. You see another human being and for some extraordinary reason you're in a state of joy and ecstasy over that person, but the driving force which enables you to express that and to bring it into your life is love. Without love, it's nothing. It passes. It's the same with seeking reality, and there the

driving force we call faith. It's a very difficult thing to define, actually.

MR. BUCKLEY: Well, why is it that scientists, who devote themselves at least as avidly professionally as journalists to seeking out the truth, so many of them don't stumble on this mystery?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: The greatest ones do, incidentally. Einstein, Whitehead, people like that. The very highest names in science do stumble on it and for precisely the same reason, because the knowledge that they have through their researches is so limited, so fragile, so inadequate that they too are forced to find some absolute.

MR. BUCKLEY: Now, the use of the word "mystery" has been much disdained by skeptics as a too easy way to account for some of the hideous anomalous tortures of history; the Holocaust, to take something on a macrocosmic scale; the six-year-old little girl who dies of leukemia at another scale. Isn't it probably the case that such anomalies as these do more to encourage skepticism than anything in the divine order?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I don't think they encourage skepticism. On the contrary, I would say that they encourage credulity, as a matter of fact. What they do is they present a dilemma to which reason provides no answer.

MR. BUCKLEY: Yes.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: And you can only find that answer through what is called mysticism, or indeed through what Blake called the Imagination, which is art.

MR. BUCKLEY: Now, what did Blake mean by Imagination?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: He meant, putting it in one of my very favorite sayings of his, when he says--because it's so like this very medium we're working in now--he says, "They ever must believe a lie who see with not thro' the eye." He meant by Imagination seeing through the eye--seeing into this meaning of things rather than seeing things.

MR. BUCKLEY: How would Blake have seen through to such a phenomenon as I mentioned--the death of a six-year-old child?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Because he would see in it-- There are some lines of his which I can't quote exactly from memory, but: Joy and woe, woven fine clothing for the soul divine. In other words, suffering affliction, disappointment, failure--all these things--are an integral part of the drama of our human existence, and without them, there'd be no drama. Let me tell you what will be a simple parable which I've often thought of. Some very humane, rather simpleminded old lady sees the play King Lear performed, and she is outraged that a poor old man should be so humiliated, so made to suffer. And in the eternal

shade she meets Shakespeare, and she says to him, "What a brutal thing that was, what a monstrous thing, to make that poor old man go through all that." And Shakespeare says, "Yes, I quite agree. It was very painful. And I could, of course, have arranged for him to take a sedative at the end of Act I, but then, ma'am, there would have been no play."

MR. BUCKLEY: Well--

MR. MUGGERIDGE: See my point?

MR. BUCKLEY: Yes, I see your point. On the other hand, I'm not sure that King Lear wouldn't have preferred that there should not have been a play than that he should have lived through Acts II and III.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: But then he would have been a cowardly man. And of course, he did in fact have to go through that suffering in order to understand why there had to be a play. And of course, in that marvelous speech of his--one of my favorite things in all Shakespeare--when he, to Cordelia, says, "We two will go to prison," you know, "and take upon's the mystery of things." It's a beautiful phrase, isn't it? It expresses exactly what I mean. This affliction has to be, and that of course is why one is drawn irresistibly as a Western European to the Christian faith and to Christ, because this is the central point: the cross. There's another parable I've often thought of. When Saint Paul starts off on his journeys, he consults with an eminent public relations man: "I've got this campaign and I want to promote this gospel." And the man would say, "Well, you've got to have some sort of symbol. You've got to have an image. You've got to have some sign of your faith." And then Paul would say, "Well, I have got one. I've got this cross." The public relations man would have laughed his head off. "You can't popularize a thing like that. It's absolutely mad." But it wasn't mad. It worked for centuries and centuries, bringing out all the creativity in people, all the love and disinterestedness in people, this symbol of suffering. And I think that's the heart of the thing. Of course, it's what has been lost and why the faith is languishing, because it cannot take in that truth that we can learn nothing. And you know, as an old man, Bill, looking back on one's life, it's one of the things that strikes you most forcibly, that the only thing that's taught one anything is suffering; not success, not happiness, not anything like that. The only thing that teaches one what life's about--the joy of understanding, the joy of coming in contact with what it really signifies--is suffering, is affliction.

MR. BUCKLEY: Well, you may recall the closing passages in The Life of Saint Francis, in which Chesterton remarks that whatever tortures he suffered as his life came to an end from whatever cause, one thing only one could know is that it was a happy man dying. Now the paradox--and I've witnessed it twice, people suffering agonies but who are spiritually serene--is: It may be easier for people who suffer through experience than

for them who see them suffering.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Certainly, I'm sure it is. I think because, first of all, there is an element you could almost call decency in us which says, "Well, I haven't had to suffer it myself and therefore it ill behooves me to point to it as a blessing."

MR. BUCKLEY: Yes.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: But of course, that would eliminate this idea of the cross, which was for everyone. Actually, in every time and every age, this is demonstrated to us, and I think in our time it's been marvelously demonstrated by Solzhenitsyn and the other heroic people from the Soviet labor camps, all of whom say the same thing--the ones that have achieved spiritual perception through it--that there they learnt this point, that it's through the affliction that you can see reality and that therefore, as Solzhenitsyn himself says in his Gulag book, "Thank you, prison camp, for bringing this illumination into my life which otherwise I would have lost."

MR. BUCKLEY: Well, a reductionism of that point, however, you wouldn't applaud, namely that Stalin was God's prophet.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: No, but he might be God's instrument. In fact he was, because in history it's impossible for anybody to function except as God's instrument because history is the scenario that God's written, and the parts--all the parts--are necessary, just as the part of Judas was necessary for the Incarnation.

MR. BUCKLEY: If one indulges in that kind of predeterminism, one strips that drama of the spontaneity that, for instance, was shown by King Lear, doesn't one?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: But the thing is, it's not--

MR. BUCKLEY: How do you handle that paradox?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: It's determinism within the-- I mean, it's freedom within the context of God's will, which is not the same as determinism. We live to work out a drama which is God's drama, and therefore everything that happens to us is in some degree God's will. We are participating in the unfolding of God's will. Supposing it's true, for instance, at this moment--which I think it probably is--that what we call Western civilization is guttering out to a collapse. If you take that in purely human historical terms, this is an unmitigated catastrophe. You and I must beat our breasts and say that we lived to see the end of everything, that we--

MR. BUCKLEY: But not quite the end of everything, because the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Right, but also, historically speaking, what we love is coming to an end.

MR. BUCKLEY: Christendom.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Christendom finished.

MR. BUCKLEY: It probably has finished.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I think so. Why, certainly. But the point is that is a catastrophe only to the extent that you don't see it as part of the realization of God's purposes. I tell you, a thing I often think of, as I beat my breast over what's going on in the world, was Saint Augustine receiving the news in Carthage that Rome had been sacked. Well, I mean, that's an appalling thing. He was a very civilized Roman, and it was a dreadful thing that the barbarians should have come in there and they should have burned the place down.

MR. BUCKLEY: And he had been there for ten years.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Absolutely. Now, what did he say to his flock? He said, "This is grievous news, but let us remember if it's happened, then God has willed it; let men build cities and men destroy cities. But there's also the City of God, and that's where we belong." To me, that's the perfect expression, and I think--

MR. BUCKLEY: Well, he said, that's where we belong, but this is what we will never achieve.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Right, but it's insofar as we are citizens of the City of God that we can be Christians in the City of Man.

MR. BUCKLEY: We can bear it.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: We can bear it.

MR. BUCKLEY: All right now, but this is in no sense a counsel to submissiveness, is it?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Not at all. Not at all.

MR. BUCKLEY: Ah. How do you distinguish between the mandate that says acknowledge all adversity with a spirit of compliance and that counsel which says you were meant to struggle?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Yes.

MR. BUCKLEY: To struggle for your own livelihood, for your own principles, for your own country, for your own family.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Well, again you see, I think--and this is another great part of the realization of reality in transcendental terms--that both those things are true, just as our Lord said to the people who were questioning Him--cunningly He said, "Yes, we owe things to Caesar and we owe things to God." We are living in our time and it is our duty to acquit ourselves in the context of that time as truthfully, nobly,

lovingly as we can.

MR. BUCKLEY: Well, how does Caesar feature, for instance, in the struggle of the individual against physical adversity? You have, on previous occasions, spoken of the requirement--the ethical and religious requirement--that one struggle to live as long as one can. Your war against euthanasia is the extreme example of this. How does Caesar figure here in that struggle--

MR. MUGGERIDGE: It simply means--

MR. BUCKLEY: --against submissiveness?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: It simply means that you are not in a position, you're not competent--to decide either that your own life should come to an end or that other lives should come to an end, that you must be engaged on the side of life and the sacredness of life in its earthly version--in its earthly terms--as you are a citizen of the earthly city. But of course, your eyes are cast and, as you get to the end of your life more and more cast, in the direction of the City of God.

MR. BUCKLEY: Well--

MR. MUGGERIDGE: There are the two things, you see. I think one of the terrible difficulties we have in discussing these matters is this: that rooted in our minds is what Kierkegaard calls the either/or proposition. I mean, either we have free will or it is determinism. This is not so. We have got free will, and not a sparrow can fall to the ground without God's will--or God's willing it.

MR. BUCKLEY: There is a complementarity somewhere?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Absolutely. And that is essential to know, and this scientific idea of either/or is a very disastrous proposition.

MR. BUCKLEY: Now, wait a minute. You're not denying the principle of contradiction, are you?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: NO.

MR. BUCKLEY: You cannot be and not be at the same time.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: NO. NO.

MR. BUCKLEY: SO that's an either/or

MR. MUGGERIDGE: But you can be, as the Incarnation showed--God can exist as a man and a man can be God. Why the terrific power of that drama, why it sheds such a light on the things we're talking about--that Christian drama--is precisely because it exemplified that.

MR. BUCKLEY: Well--

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Jesus had to suffer. Otherwise, what's the cross? There's no sacrifice. At the same time, He had to be God because He was perfect.

MR. BUCKLEY: "Christ without the crucifixion is liberalism," said Whittaker Chambers.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Yes, it's very good, that.

MR. BUCKLEY: Well, these false disjunctions are probably the principal blocks, are they not, to a more universal acceptance of God?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: They are, but we can't elucidate them in terms that the 20th century wants.

MR. BUCKLEY: No, because the vocabulary is wanting, isn't it?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Absolutely.

MR. BUCKLEY: It requires either a vocabulary so sophisticated as to be elusive except to the very few, or intuition, which is why the Russian illiterate kulak in Gulag understands, right?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Yes, this is true, but at the same time, if you take the case of Pascal--it always interests me very much--who was the greatest mind of his time and the leading scientist of his time, it was through his science and through his intellect that he arrived at the conclusion that the mind itself was sort of a cul-de-sac and that he could only fulfill his life and grasp what it was about and relate himself to its true reality through faith. And that is the point. That's a marvelous definition of faith, you know, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where it says, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen." In other words, it gives a shape to this marvelous hope that grows up in us.

MR. BUCKLEY: Why wouldn't it also if it were illusory?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: If it were illusory? Well, I mean, yes, it could be so, but then we have to assume that with grace we can distinguish between illusory things and real things, that the mystery comprehends both.

MR. BUCKLEY: Your approach to God and to Christianity is through--to use a paradoxical term--the understanding of mystery, and yet--

MR. MUGGERIDGE: The acceptance of a mystery, Bill, I would rather have it.

MR. BUCKLEY: Acceptance of the mystery.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I don't understand it, because nobody ever

will by its very nature.

MR. BUCKLEY: That's why I said paradoxical.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Yes, but still, it is the acceptance of it, I bow my head in humility, I hope, and would wish to do--

MR. BUCKLEY: Yes.

MR. MUGGERIDGE: --and to say, "Thy will be done," meaning I accept totally the mystery of these circumstances.

MR. BUCKLEY: Yes, well, in the last couple of minutes, let me ask you this. You decline to generalize on the basis of your own approach to faith, the likely approach of other people. Is this because yours is idiosyncratic, or is it because you are convinced that it always comes individually?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: Basically, I think it is the latter, that I'm absolutely sure that the ways to God are infinitely diverse, depending on temperaments and circumstances and hundreds of things; and one of the things that is, to me, off-putting in a certain amount of very otherwise creditable Christian manifestations of our time--is the idea there is a standard procedure that you're going to go that way, almost as though Bunyan had written in his pilgrimage that unless you actually took that path--you know, mark that on the map--you've had it. And I would, also in utter humility--because I don't regard myself as in any way a good Christian or one who will approach the Pearly Gates other than in the most craven state of mind as to the record that will be in the hands of whoever keeps the gate--

MR. BUCKLEY: Well, to say that you are an imperfect Christian is, for one thing, to acknowledge a congenital flaw in human nature, but to say that you approached God in a distinctive way is not to discourage, obviously, other people from seeking him out--

MR. MUGGERIDGE: I sincerely hope not.

MR. BUCKLEY: --according to their own inclinations and temperaments, right?

MR. MUGGERIDGE: It's a terrible thing, you see, that as you get this idea of what being a good Christian is and you become stricken with your own inadequacy, your sense of yourself as a sinner--as a hopeless person--is magnified. I used to think it was an affectation in someone like Saint Francis or Saint Paul to say, "I am the prince of sinners," you know, but I see that--or Mother Teresa, who was always the one to say, "I'm not worthy, I'm not worthy,"--but it is to the extent that you can conceive this fulfillment, this spiritual fulfillment--

MR. BUCKLEY: It becomes true. Thank you very much, Malcolm Muggeridge.